

Last year, Cuban citizens were allowed to celebrate Christmas. In January, Pope John Paul II conducted a series of open air masses across the country that were televised. And recently, direct humanitarian charter flights to Cuba and cash remittances to Cuban relatives of U.S. citizens were resumed and the provision of medicine and food was authorized.

These initiatives were the precursors to future efforts toward peaceful cross-cultural engagement, including people-to-people contact among academics, media and yes, even athletes.

The last major league team to play baseball in Cuba was the 1947 Brooklyn Dodgers, who held spring training in Havana to insulate Jackie Robinson from the racial hatred so prevalent in the United States at that time. Fifty-two years later, the role has changed. The first major league team to visit Cuba in 40 years, on March 28, 1999, the Baltimore Orioles, will be ambassadors of peace.

Sports has historically been an arena in which athlete-to-athlete contact has led to off-the-field or court engagement. Moreover, baseball as the national pastime of the United States and Cuba is the natural choice to promote goodwill among our countries' citizens. It is time that we reach out to the Cuban people with such democracy-building efforts.

I am proud that the City of Baltimore is in the forefront of an initiative that will help to chip away the barriers that have isolated the citizens of Cuba from the United States. I applaud Mayor Kurt Schmoke and Peter Angelos, the Orioles owner, for seizing the opportunity to strengthen a historic bond between the Cuban and American people.

Let us all take note, democracy is based upon the conviction that there are extraordinary possibilities in ordinary times. I urge my colleagues to support the Baltimore Orioles and the City of Baltimore in their efforts.

Mr. HOYER. Mr. Speaker, let me add that this exhibition is not an abandonment of our Nation's policies toward Castro or his regime, nor is it a weakening of our resolve against the tyranny of communism. The proceeds from this game, in fact, will go to build baseball stadiums, not politics. But it is an opportunity to showcase what is common to the people of the United States and Cuba, a passion for the game of baseball.

I want to join the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. CUMMINGS) in congratulating Peter Angelos, the owner of the Baltimore Orioles, who has done so much for baseball, so much for Baltimore and is now doing so much to reach out a hand to try to bring better relations but doing so in the context of not accommodating a regime with which we do not agree but telling a people that is sometimes under that re-

gime that we want to be their friends, if not the friends of their government.

Governments cannot come together unless the people they serve find a common ground.

This exhibition will not dissolve the differences between our two governments but it will allow the people of both lands to share in their common passion.

Once again this spring, children in this country will pick up their bats and gloves and hit the playing fields with the same passion that has motivated children and lovers of the game for years.

So too will the youth of Cuba.

Their determination and effort will be directed to the game.

They will be absorbed in the pitching and power hitters of their opponents not their politics.

The Baltimore Orioles exhibition in Havana will allow the people of both countries to share their passions for the game and perhaps highlight what the people of our nations have in common and not the differences that divide them.

It comes as no surprise to me that Peter Angelos and the Baltimore Orioles have led the effort to see this game become a reality and on behalf of the State of Maryland I want to thank Peter Angelos for his vision for baseball.

A vision broader than the game itself which removes the barriers for all who share a love for the great game of baseball.

BALTIMORE ORIOLES-CUBA EXHIBITION BASEBALL GAMES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. CARDIN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. Speaker, I want to follow the comments of the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. HOYER) and the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. CUMMINGS) in really congratulating the Baltimore Orioles and Peter Angelos for arranging for a game between the Baltimore Orioles and the Cuban national team.

As the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. HOYER) indicated, baseball really speaks an international language. This is going to be good for our Nation and good for the people of Cuba. None of the economic proceeds will go to the government of Cuba. Peter Angelos has really, I think, done a favor for this Nation. I support this game. It has nothing to do about politics. It is a game. Two countries whose identity is deeply rooted in their national pastime. I think a fan who was quoted in the Miami Herald recently had the right outlook for this game when he said, "They should play it. It's a game after all."

I would also like to quote from one of the real great diplomats in baseball, one of the great Earls, the Earl of Baltimore, Earl Weaver, the famous manager of the Baltimore Orioles. I think he had the game of baseball right when he said, in baseball you can't sit on a

lead and run a few plays into the line and just kill the clock. Earl once said, you've got to throw the ball over the plate and give the other man his chance. That is why baseball is the greatest game of them all, and now we are going to be able to have a good will game, two good will games between the Cuban national team and the Baltimore Orioles.

Mr. Speaker, let the games begin.

I am thrilled at the likelihood of an historic sports exchange with Cuba in the very near future.

I am sure many of you have heard the news of a goodwill game between the Cuban national team and Maryland's beloved Baltimore Orioles. I commend Orioles owner Peter Angelos for his hard work to make this dream a reality.

I am here tonight to express my strong support for this initiative and to urge the U.S. Congress to join all of us here tonight in supporting this worthy endeavor.

I want to say from the outset that any proceeds from this exchange will not go to the Cuban Government. The proceeds will go to support baseball and other activities related to sports in our two countries.

Indeed, supporting this initiative has nothing to do with politics. That may seem strange here in Washington where it is our job in many respects to see the world through a political prism.

But this is one time, thankfully, when it is to our advantage to see an exchange between two countries, not as a political event, but simply as a game—America's game and Cuba's game. These are two countries whose identity is deeply rooted to their national pastime.

I think a fan quoted in the Miami Herald recently had the right outlook for this game when he said, "They should just play. It's a game after all."

It is indeed a game after all. A bat and a ball, two teams, a field and the undivided attention of two nations. That is all, Mr. Speaker, and that should be enough for now.

Perhaps we should heed the diplomatic words of one of the world's great Earls—the Earl of Baltimore. Earl Weaver's famous comment about America's pastime is the reason why this game is such a wonderful idea and opportunity for both nations:

In baseball "you can't sit on a lead and run a few plays into the line and just kill the clock," Earl once said. "You've got to throw the ball over the plate and give the other man his chance. That's why baseball is the greatest game of them all."

Wherever it might be played, baseball is the best game around. So Mr. Speaker, let the games begin.

THE DEBT DOWN PAYMENT ACT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Kansas (Mr. MORAN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. MORAN of Kansas. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be here this evening and particularly with the distinguished gentleman from Ohio (Mr. KASICH), the chairman of the Committee on the

Budget, in the Chamber this evening. I would like to point out a few facts to my colleagues.

I know that these are issues of importance to all of us, and I think it is useful to be reminded that as of March 1, the first day of this month, 1999, the Federal national debt was \$5.62 trillion. That debt is increasing. In fact, it increased in 1999 by \$95 billion in all of our trust funds. The total interest that we paid last year on the national debt was almost 15 percent of the total budget, about \$243 billion.

Mr. Speaker, now is the optimum time to take the steps necessary to reduce the national debt. Our economy, although not necessarily the Kansas economy, is strong and Federal revenues stand ready for debt reduction. On the very near horizon, however, we face a challenge of financing the retirement of the baby boom generation. If we can get our fiscal house in order now, we can meet this challenge. But if we delay, our children will face the dual burden of servicing a large national debt, along with facing the liabilities to Social Security and Medicare. We do not have surpluses as far out as we can see.

Mr. Speaker, as the chart indicates, the national debt grows, and by the year 2040, because of that generation of retirees, the national debt increases to 200 percent of the gross domestic product. We need to take advantage of this opportunity to begin the process of paying down our national debt. Paying down the debt can lower interest rates. Student loans, car loans, home mortgages and farm debts can all be less burdensome with lower interest rates that the borrowing from the Federal Government would generate.

Last week, the gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. PICKERING) and I introduced H.R. 948, the Debt Down Payment Act, and I spent some time on the floor, an extended amount of time on the floor, explaining this legislative attempt to my colleagues. This bill establishes a 10-year plan for reducing the debt held by the public. It would reduce it by \$2.4 trillion; an average annual payment on the debt of \$240 billion; no new spending; saves \$729 billion in interest payments over 10 years. \$729 billion. And it removes the Social Security trust fund from the revenues that we calculate our surplus to provide some honesty, not only to the American people but especially to ourselves.

This bill establishes a gradually reduced limit for public debt held over the next 10 years, and by the year 2000, this debt limit would be lowered to \$3.5 trillion, requiring a first year debt reduction of \$100 billion.

Our Nation's most respected economists remind us of the importance of paying down the national debt and the opportunity that provides to shore up Social Security.

In just 13 years, payment from the Social Security trust fund will exceed the incoming revenue to the Social Security trust fund. By reducing debt today, we can do something that will make it easier to meet the needs of the next generation's retirement, and by removing the Social Security trust fund revenues from the annual surplus calculations, we will gain a more accurate understanding of where we stand financially.

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I have been pleased by recent reports the Senate budget proposal may include a similar proposal toward reducing the debt. By establishing statutory debt limits on publicly held debt we can hold our collective feet to the fire by locking in gradual debt reduction. Debt reduction should be a central component of our budget plans, and I urge my colleagues in both chambers to insist that the 2000 budget proposal include a long-term plan to pay down our national debt. Let us agree today to put an end to treating our national budget like a bad credit card spending. Let us agree to pay more than the monthly minimum and stop spending 15 percent of our budget on interest payments.

We are like those people with the credit card who just keep spending. We do not even hardly make the minimum payment. We pay the interest, but we have no plan to ever pay the principle, and today we ought to take the steps toward establishing a plan to do just that. We are at a crossroads. Let us make the legacy that we leave to the next generation one of economic hope and prosperity.

RESOLUTION OF THE NAGORNO KARABAGH CONFLICT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, I wanted to take this opportunity tonight to welcome the visiting President of the Nagorno Karabagh Republic, Mr. Arkady Ghukasian. President Ghukasian is visiting our Nation's capital this week as part of a trip that also includes stops in California and New York, and accompanying the President on his first visit to the United States is Ms. Naira Melkounian, the Foreign Minister of the Nagorno Karabagh Republic.

Yesterday I took part in a meeting with President Ghukasian and Foreign Minister Melkounian that was attended by several of my colleagues in the House from both parties. The President also held private meetings with several other Members of the House and the Senate and representatives of the Armenian Assembly of America and the Armenian National Committee

of America also took part in those meetings. The President also had meetings with the State Department and met with some of Washington's leading think tanks and the media.

Mr. Speaker, Nagorno Karabagh is a region in the Caucasus Mountains of the former Soviet Union that has now and always has historically been populated by Armenians. Unfortunately, Nagorno Karabagh's independence has not been given recognition by the United States or the international community. Neighboring Azerbaijan continues to claim Nagorno Karabagh's territory. A bloody war was fought over this region, and the Karabagh Armenians successfully defended their homeland. A cease-fire was declared in 1994, which has more or less held despite ongoing violations by Azerbaijan, but a final resolution of the conflict has been elusive.

Mr. Speaker, the United States is a leader in the effort to help the parties to this conflict achieve a just and lasting resolution of the conflict. The U.S. is a co-chair along with France and Russia of the Minsk Group, of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe established to resolve this dispute.

The United States and our Minsk Group partners last year put forward a new plan known as the Common-State proposal for resolving the conflict. Armenia and Nagorno Karabagh have both agreed to accept the proposal as a basis for negotiations despite serious reservations, but Azerbaijan's response to the constructive proposal by the United States and our partners has been a flat no.

Mr. Speaker, the U.S. non-recognition of Nagorno Karabagh creates issues about who in the State Department should meet with President Ghukasian or other representatives of Nagorno Karabagh, and last week I was joined by 19 of my colleagues on a bipartisan basis in writing to Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott asking that in his capacity as the American co-chair of the Minsk Group he personally meet with Mr. Ghukasian during his visit to our Nation's capital. Unfortunately, Secretary Talbott was not in Washington at the time of President Ghukasian's visit, and President Ghukasian met instead with Donald Keyser who is special negotiator for Nagorno Karabagh and the NIS regional conflicts. Mr. Keyser I should say is doing a fine job in trying to win the confidence of the parties to the conflict, but I believe it is important to stress the need for the highest level contacts possible which are appropriate and provide a sign of goodwill that would help encourage progress in the negotiations. President Ghukasian's status as the elected leader of one of the parties to the conflict argues in of according him high-level recognition, and indeed our two Minsk Group partners, France and Russia, provide a